IT'S A SHERIFF

RUBEN BLADES OF THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR
Renaissance man RUBEN BLADES lives only to please his own
strict personal integrity. In his music and film work, he expects
give his best, come hell or commercial acceptability

Interviewing actor/singer/songwriter/lawyer/journalist and aspiring polit-
cicin Ruben Blades is not a recommended exercise for anyone with a
potential inferiority complex. Most of us struggle for competency in
just one field; Ruben excels at any activity he attempts. Sickening!
This Panamanian-born Renaissance man is not yet a household name
outside of Hispanic homes, but that may very well soon change. Star-
ring role in a major movie directed by Robert Redford, an English lan-
guage record featuring Lou Reed, Sting and Elvis Costello, and a new
Latin album set for release?

Ruben Blades is on a bigger roll than the Michelin man.

His workload makes Hercules seem like a shirker, but Ruben claims, "I'm just a very
disorganized person. I need to think
about things a long time before they material-
ize. It is not the creative process that takes
so long but the execution. So when I move, I
MOVE and get it done!"

His part in Redford's warmly received new
film, The Milagro Beanfield War, is giving
Blades' handsome features wide exposure,
and he and Bob have formed a mutual appre-
ciation society.
"Ruben is a natural actor, I instantly felt he
was right for the film," Redford said recently.
"He understood the part quickly and expressed
his own good instincts. He's a very talented
man, and his performance is quite fine."

In Milagro, Blades plays the town's laid-
back sheriff, an amiable peacemaker caught
between the angry locals and the rapacious
land developers threatening their very exist-
ence.
The making of The Milagro Beanfield War
was a long and troubled process; problems
ranging from casting and script conflict to un-
seasonably bad weather and Robert Redford's
legendary tardiness.

"The only flaw I can find in Redford is
that he has no notion of time. He has his own
watch, but he's a perfectionist. He's trying to
capture the right feel, the right moment, and
that accounts for some of the delay."

That aside, Blades found Milagro "a very
rewarding experience, on many levels. I've
ever been to New Mexico, and I loved the
area and the people there very much. Working
with Redford was a delight. He's a person
that protects the actors and encourages them to
act and show emotion. He looks for
truth in terms of acting."

Ruben's name comes first in Milagro's
credits, but that is because the ensemble cast
is listed alphabetically. More recognizable
names include Christopher Walken, John
Heard, Daniel Stern, Melanie Griffith and
Brazilian beauty Sonia (Kiss Of The Spider
Woman) Braga.

Despite his fine performance, Ruben rates
it as his second best work to date, "I feel my
best was in Crossover Dreams, but one of the
problems with that film was that people thought
I was just playing myself (he portrays
a salsa star seeking wider acceptance). That
was not so, but that view took something
away from my acting."

Prior to Crossover Dreams, Ruben ap-
ppeared in B movie The Last Fight, then went
ton to star alongside Richard Pryor in Critical
Condition and with Whoopie Goldberg in
Fatal Beauty.
The latter film, in particular, was scarcely
art, but Blades has a consistent philosophy be-
hind all the roles he accepts.
"Fatal Beauty gave me the chance to do
something I've always advanced — the need
to present other than the usual negative
stereotype of the Latin. The fact that this was
a role where I didn't have to climb out a
window with a Sony on my back but played a
detective was very appealing.

"And I have tremendous admiration for
Richard Pryor. When I work, I'm also
watching others work. I'd eventually like to
direct, so this is a hands-on apprenticeship."

Without denigrating those two films,
Ruben tellingly admits that "in the future, I
hope to be offered and do better roles."

In both his movies and music, Blades
stresses the need for more cultural tolerance.

"We'll be forced to admit that the key to sur-
vival is to deal with each other. We cannot
survive separately."

Interestingly, Redford voices almost iden-
tical sentiments. "Chicago culture has to be
respected as a major part of our country. Be-
fore, stereotypes and caricatures of Hispanics
were cartoonish and unfair. Hopefully that is
changing.

His career as an actor may be flourishing,
but Ruben Blades is not about to forsake his
first love, music.

He's acknowledged as the reigning super-
ostar of salsa and contemporary Latin music,
and has four Grammy nominations, hit al-
bums, and sell-out tours to prove it.

Unlike most of his peers, he doesn't rely
on romantic ballads and he has revolutionized the
(wide use of synthesis)
(hard-hitting social and political
novations). His major labors
ando America, Encinas —
have helped draw a
salsa, and now Ruben is
crossover dream by release of
language album, Nothing But
Via involvement in the
the Amnesty tour, and work
and Linda Ronstadt (deep
link with South Africa), both
the attention of the North
and this new LP work
Duty, and this new LP work
But don't go accusing him
promise or concessions

"I believe people will see
choice that follows the line
work. I didn't go for the ex-
the honesty in my lyrics, an
up with an album that
provacative."

Indeed he has. Biggest s
But The Truth is the strong
feel of a couple of songs, a
t into, co-writer Lou Reed
stresses he's not stranger to it

I didn't need a crash
have been false. In Panam
music from all parts of the
Frankie Lymon, Eddie Co
The Beatles — everybody."

Is he expecting the sw
draw flak?""That would only come
people, and I don't think the
majority. If people grant me
I think I've shown in my pr

Illustration by RICK SEALOCK
The man RUBEN BLADES lives only to please his own
personal integrity. In his music and film work, he expects to
put it, come hell or commercial acceptability

From the beginning, acting was the goal for Blades. "I want to
be an actor," he said, "and I want it to be in films." His
stint as a lawyer was short-lived, and he soon moved to New York
City to pursue acting. However, he found it difficult to make
a living as an actor, and in the late 1960s, he began writing
and recording his own music. His first album, "Salsa," was
released in 1970, and it quickly became a hit. Blades
then began to work as a producer and director, and his films
have been both critically acclaimed and commercially
successful. His most recent film, "Fatal Beauty," is a
remarkable achievement, both in terms of its storytelling
and in its use of music. Blades' dedication to his craft is
apparent in every aspect of his work, and he continues to
inspire others with his passion and talent.

MOVING PICTURES

by KERRY DOOLE

Illustration by RICK SEALOCK
achievement, then they’d have to admit this is not an easy first album to make.

"It doesn’t cater to the format, it doesn’t patronize the audience, and it jumps right into the fray of what is happening today without any concessions. When you make those concessions, that is when you’re selling out!"

Rubén’s long-awaited English debut was once expected to include collaborations with the likes of Dylan and Springsteen, but it still sports a heavyweight credit list via Reed, co-writer Elvis Costello and Sting, who donated I Can’t Say, written specifically for Blades.

"The people I chose are ones that feel like me. They’re mavericks in terms of the industry because they’re songwriters who write what they feel is important; not necessarily what they feel will sell a million."

Certainly if Rubén was chasing the Yankee dollar greedily, he wouldn’t include such angrily political songs as Oliver's Doo-Wop and In Salvador. Sticking it to that dastardly ‘hero’ Oliver North may be risky, but it is also long overdue.

"I find it amazing that after the Iran-Contra affair, it would take a Latin to write such a song. Why didn’t someone here do it?"

"Perhaps because they have to take commercial risks into consideration. The idea is not to turn off anybody, so you produce bland stuff that never attacks directly or clearly."

Even Rubén’s satirical or protest songs possess a deft melodic touch. "I’ve always written like that. People who don’t know Spanish often said to me that if they listened to a song before they read the translation, they’d find it to be pretty, then be shocked to hear the lyrics were so strong."

"What I’ve always answered is that life is a little bit of kiss and a little bit of slap. If you want a balance, you present both.

Rubén’s ‘kiss’ songs are equally unconventional. "To me, most love songs ring false, they seem to be a formula. The love songs here are my interpretation of the reality of love — where you’re surprised by it and don’t know what to do about it. Love is a constant reassessment; one can be in love, yet be afraid of that."

Regardless of its commercial fate, Blades expects Nothing But The Truth to act as his calling card in the rock world. "I think I’ll hear a lot more propositions now. People will ask Sting or Lou or Bob Dylan, and they’ll say ‘Sure, he’s smart, he’s got ideas, I’ve worked with him.’ Musicians should get together; music should unite."

The heightened social and political conscience of some rockers pleases him. "Look at U2 and Midnight Oil. Things seem to be going in a more real direction."

Rubén Blades is not about to desert his Latino following. A new Spanish album is now due, and he’s already writing for the next.

He blames the rigidity of radio for salsa’s failure to gain a stronger foothold in North America, despite the seemingly universal appeal of this most sensual and romantic of genres.

"Radio formats have impeded that possibility. They’re geared to certain people and cultures, certain ages, economic and racial groups. When you don’t hear certain cultural expressions, people don’t even acknowledge them. Hopefully that is going to change."

Always a man more interested in the welfare of his people that his latest chart number, Rubén still intends to return to Panama, his highly troubled homeland. Given his public profile and a Harvard masters degree in international law, he has been seriously tipped as a potential future President of Panama.

"I can’t really set a timetable, but eventually I will go back. I HAVE to go back; it is where my cycle will end. It began there and will end there. It is where I can be most effective."

"In Panama, we have to create the conditions that could lead to the work I want to do. We need an independent judiciary and a constitution that is not interfered with by the military."

‘LIFE IS a little bit of kiss and a little bit of slap.

If you want a balance, you present both’

Whew! While we worry whether our rent checks will bounce, here’s a man with the destiny of his country riding on his shoulders. Tiffany and Rick Astley don’t have such problems. Doesn’t the pressure of acting as a role model, as the conscience of a nation, get tiring?

"Not really, because I never confuse myself with Jesus. I pride myself on trying to find the truth, and doing what I understand to be right. I want to become part of the solution, not part of the problem!"
TALKING HEADS

Naked
(Sire)

What makes the Talking Heads great is their constant forward momentum. Not content to rest on past successes, they are always pushing, prodding, exploring and pushing the boundaries of the pop song. And, as they endure, they refuse to become formulaic. Consequently, they just get more influential. *Naked* is a case in point. This is a United Nations celebration of musical forms, all synthesized through the Heads' peculiarly American sensibilities. Musician with names like Yves N'Djekck, Philippe Severain, Manolo Bandera, Moussa Cissako...

'A UNITED NATIONS CELEBRATION OF MUSICAL FORMS'

The music has both a compelling sound and a fun, party-style atmosphere. There's a distinct African perception feel, a touch of Cajun, and a healthy smattering of jazz horn arrangements and a smorgasbord of other musical genres. Add to that David Byrne's finely honed sense of the satirical and you've got an album that is both challenging and fun.

Notable tracks include the salsa-flavored *Mr. Jones* with its Latin horns and the eerie cumbia of *The Democratic Circus*. A current favorite is the delightfully satirical *Nothing But Flowers* with its exuberant highlife sound.

Here, Byrne turns Joni Mitchell's Big Yellow Taxi completely on its ear. "They paved paradise and put up a parking lot," becomes "Once there were shopping malls/Now it's all covered in flowers/If this is paradise/I wish I had a lawn mower." The point's the same, but Byrne's edgy humor updates it and brings it home. The best thing about this album is the good-natured way in which significant points are made. No pontificating for this band. Epic may not be, but their vital humanity keeps them a very alive musical force. Who's to say there's no glory in day-to-day life. That's where most of us perform our small deeds of heroism. And that's what this album celebrates.

(By Dianne Collins)

RUBEN BLADES

Nothing But The Truth
(Elektra)

This long-awaited album marks the English language debut of salsa superstar Ruben Blades. The likes of Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen had been rumored as collaborators, but instead we get Elvis Costello, Sting and Lou Reed helping their friend out with songs. Their presence will help give Blades long overdue exposure beyond his Latin audience, but this is not a wholly suc-

essful project. Blades' music has always incorporated a myriad of styles, but the range here is somewhat disconcerting. Uncle Lou's raspy guitar doesn't sit easily with Ruben's smooth, melodic voice, so an attempt at a rock anthem (*Calm Before The Storm*) sounds forced. Elsewhere, you find romantic soul, upbeat salsa, R&B, and even doo-wop a cappella (*Ollie's Doo-Wop*). Some consistency is imparted via the excellence of Blades' lyrics, which combine strong political and social comment with evocative vignettes of life on the street. The *Hit* describes a barrio gangland murder with vivid intensity, while *Ollie's Doo-Wop* sticks it to that most dubious of heroes, Oliver North, and Reagan's vicious 'better dead than red' Latin American policy. Such tough lyrics won't grant Ruben easy access to radio play, but ballads like the Sting song *I Can't Say* and *The Letter* would fit adult contemporary formats. A large cast of top session musicians and backing singers (James Ingram included) ensure a full sound, and the inventive vocal arrangements are highlights. There is some excellent stuff here, but it doesn't quite measure up to the standards of such recent Blades albums as *Buscando America* and *Agua de Luna*. Look forward to a new Spanish language record from the ever prolific singer/songwriter soon.

(By Kerry Doole)

THE TRAGICALLY HIP

The Tragically Hip
(Rock/BMG)

Ever so rarely, a new band emerges from the pack, so unpretentious in nature that you immediately want to clap them to your bosom and tell everyone you know that YOU have discovered this treasure. It's the first time you heard R.E.M. or the Georgia Satellites or the Fabulous Thunderbirds. There was something so totally honest about their music that it defined description. All you knew was that playing their records was a totally addictive experience. The Tragically Hip is that kind of band. So earthy and honest that you just have to like them. Musically, they've been compared to the Rolling Stones, The Animals and The Doors — justifiably so, considering the raw intensity of their songs. Lyri-

cally, the Hip have that their songs are also Canada, with the U.S. presence in their *Town Brindisi*, a Cemetery Sideroad to the band's kaleidoscope by Red Rider's Ken Cotter will succeed because of its honesty. It's just fantastic — the stuff's great.

(By Keith Sharp)

ZODIAC MINDWARP (above) AND L.A. GUNS: TWO BANDS, FROM OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE OCEAN, WHO THINK ALIKE.